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ABSTRACT

Social meaning includes evaluation of languages themselves. Linguists often say all languages are equal. This is true in regard to potential, not true of actual state. All varieties of language share with pidgins and creoles the condition of being the result of a particular history of use, specialization, elaboration, and loss. A conversational narrative from northeastern Philadelphia is analyzed, showing implicit interlocking patterns of a kind pervasive in Native American languages of the Columbia River and found as well in song texts of the Finnish Kalevala tradition. The role of tense alternation is detailed. Such patterning adds to what can be known of universal properties of discourse. It can enhance respect for disregarded languages and varieties, and, for Native American texts, be a form of repatriation. Members of narrative communities can share in such analysis; indeed, much that linguists discover and take for granted can be liberating for those to whom it is unknown. Such knowledge, what can be called "elementary linguistics," should be part of general education. (Author/JL)

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Inequality in language: Taking for granted

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Social meaning includes evaluation of languages themselves. Linguistics often say all languages are equal. This is true in regard to potential, not true of actual state. All varieties of language share with pidgins and creoles the condition of being the result of a particular history of use, specialization, elaboration and loss. There are historical reasons for conflating potential and actual. It defends against misleading notions. Still, social change should be based on accurate knowledge of social reality. One can insist that all varieties are deserving of respect and study, without claiming that they are equal in what communities can do with them. Indeed, such a claim, when refuted by experience, may cast doubt on the call for respect. The dialectic of potential and actual comes together in narrative. Every community has narrative, but its role is not everywhere the same. Oral narrative has an organization of lines and relations among lines that is largely out of awareness, and of great potential complexity and effect. Whether innate or not, such organization may well be universal. A conversational narrative from northeastern Philadelphia, analyzed here, shows implicit interlocking patterns of a kind pervasive in Native American languages of the Columbia River and found as well in song texts of the Finnish Kalevala tradition. The role of tense alternation is detailed. Such patterning adds to what can be known of universal properties of discourse. It can enhance respect for disregarded languages and varieties, and, for Native American texts, be a form of repatriation. Members of narrative communities can share in such analysis. Indeed, much that linguists discover and take for granted can be liberating for those to whom it is unknown. Such knowledge, what can be called "elementary linguistics," should be part of general education.

Preface

Let me thank the Graduate School of Education, and the Wolfson family, for inviting me to give this lecture. It is sad tc speak in memory of a younger friend and colleague. But it is not everyone who accomplishes so much that others gather to keep their memory alive. I hope these remarks are a worthy tribute and will contribute to that end.

One of Nessa's accomplishments, as you know, was the building of a program in TESOL, and, more generally, educational linguistics. Someone in the position of

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dean can think such a thing desirable, but it can happen, and last, only through the efforts of faculty.

I should like to suggest something of the importance of such an accomplishment. I should like to suggest that a program in educational linguistics is in a strategic position to advance linguistics in general and to contribute to beneficial social change. It is in a strategic position because by necessity it must study not only language, but also social life. And it must do so in close attention to what people both can and can not do. It deals everyday with issues of actual competence. Put abstractly, it deals everyday with the dialectic between actual and potential ability, with the realities of inequality.[1]

Inequality was a theme of one of Nessa's books, and a continuing concern. I want to address three aspects of it. Each involves a kind of taking for granted. One has to do with something we know, but may forget. One has to do with something we may think we know, but do not. The third has to do with something we are only beginning to know.

I will talk in terms of 'language.' Most people do, including linguists, and the issue of inequality is historically associated first of all with the notion of 'language.' Ultimately, of course, the true subject is not language in the sense of 'a language,' but repertoire–the mix of means and modalities which we actually practice and experience. Study of communicative repertoire makes issues of inequality all the more salient, if only because it inescapably involves choice among alternatives.

Potential equality

The first aspect has to do with assumptions and knowledge that linguists tend to take for granted–that all languages, and varieties of language, are (potentially) equal. That users of any have a right to life, liberty (autonomy) and the pursuit of meaning.

This assumption of the equality of all varieties of language is taken for granted by most linguists, but is foreign to many outside the field. The foreignness is clear to those who work with bilingual education, or otherwise on behalf of minority languages. Within 'theoretical' linguistics, where models of syntax and the like are discussed, the matter is not likely to arise or, if it does, the focus is on potentiality.

Linguistics is rather recent as a separate discipline. The Linguistic Society of America was founded only in 1924. Many of its founders were conscious of a need to dispel misconceptions about language. They were conscious of working against popular, and even learned, conceptions which relegated many languages, especially

unwritten languages, to a 'primitive' status, lacking sufficient vocabulary, or even regularity of grammar. Much of the general linguistics of the time appeared a projection of acquaintance with the languages of one region, Europe. To combat such preconceptions was an important part of the mission of linguistics itself. Boas, Bloomfield, Sapir, Whorf and others took it as part of their mission.

This egalitarian perspective was extended to varieties within a language. It was clear that many notions of correctness had grown up, even been invented, in the course of instructing an aspiring middle class in verbal manners. Seen against the history of the language, and against other languages around the world, many preferences of pronunciation, or construction, were arbitrary. Many explanations of preferences were secondary rationalizations. The choice of a standard had little to do with intrinsic qualities, much more to do with politics, class and location.

In sum, structural differences among languages were not to be ranked on a scale of superiority. Differences within a language had social meaning for its users, and might be ranked by them, but such rankings were not intrinsic to the linguistic features themselves. They were the result of secondary association. One and the same pronunciation of 'bird' ([båid]) might be stigmatized in New York City, admired in Charleston.

The great, liberating consequence of this was to sever the age-old connection between verbal trappings and personal worth. Character does not come in one accent alone; intelligence has many voices.

We so take this for granted within linguistics now that we may forget to teach it. I remember my shock in an anthropology course some years ago at Penn when a chance question revealed that a student had just those notions about 'primitive' languages that, one came to assume, the labors of Boas, Bloomfield and Sapir had driven from the land. I had said nothing about them in class. Were it not for the chance question, the student would have passed through the class with such notions intact.

The truth is that we must never take for granted that what we take for granted is known to others. Elementary assumptions of linguistics can be liberating for those to whom they are unknown. The task of confronting misconceptions about the status of languages, as languages, may never be over. A victory which seems old, won in the past, by those such as Boas and Sapir and Bloomfield, continues to need to be won. In the United States there are those, progressive to the core, who are surprised that someone they know studies 'Indian languages.' "Are they really languages?" our daughter was asked by such a person. With regard to the languages of the Aborigines

in Australia, Blake (1991) reports: "Even among highly educated people the question is still asked, 'Do these people have real, full languages?' (vii). The book is intended to illustrate at least that this is the case, and to encourage further inquiry."

Wherever there is a variety of English that differs from a certain standard, there will be those who will see it, not as different, but as deficient. The burgeoning creativity of those in Africa and Asia and the Pacific, replanting English, cross-breeding English, their novel integrations of resources, add color and beauty to the world, if we can see them so. To those who can see them as configurations of their own (cf. Kachru, 1990).

The same kind of task may continue to be true indefinitely with what can be called the 'hidden injuries of accent.' I have argued in the past that even if everyone spoke a recognizable standard English, there would be those who would create a hierarchy out of adverbs, and lament the decline of the language. We are far from so *recherché* a state.

Students may come to a class in sociolinguistics, believing their normal speech intrinsically inferior, and leave with that sense of stigma never having become known. Last spring, my wife Virginia took on a large undergraduate class in sociolinguistics. The size of the class was frustrating; the students mostly anonymous faces. She decided to ask each student to write a journal, which she would read and respond to. From this she learned experiences and meanings as to language, of difference vs. deficiency, right vs. wrong, that would otherwise have been invisible.

Here are two successive passages from one journal:

(1a) I grew up in Akron, Ohio, but my extended family lives in the mountains of Southwest Virginia. My maternal grandfather was an uneducated coal miner who spoke spit-fire fast in an accent so stepped he was unintelligible to my ear. He had trouble understanding what I said also. Strangely the rest of my family often had to interpret for my grandfather and me. I lived in Virginia for a few years after graduating high school and before I joined the Army. While in Virginia I worked at a Pizza Hut in a small town. I had to adopt a mountain accent and change my idioms for others to comprehend me.

There were times when I understood my grandfather. He made up some neat metaphors and had a good sense of humor. He nicknamed my sister, Kathy, "Cackleberry"–a chicken egg. He pronounced this something like "cakburr," to my recollection.

(1b) My mom has lived in Ohio for over thirty years and no longer has a mountain accent. One of my sisters at 16 years old married a 'boy' and lived in Buchanan County, VA. for a few years. She has two small daughters, a 3 year old and a newborn, and is getting a divorce. Ashliegh, my 3 year old niece, speaks with a heavy mountain accent

which my mother ridicules and tries to change. Ashliegh [sic] is the smartest little girl I've ever known. She has a great command of language. My sister is living with her two daughters with my mom in Ohio, which is why my mom tries to get Ashliegh to talk right.

Sometimes one finds evidence of successful change:

(2) The concept of the linguistic variable is something I had never really given any consideration until I started working as a guide at Monticello. Although I had noticed, especially when I first came to college, that certain people pronounce words differently or use different phrases, I never considered the ramifications or causes of this variation. Being from a small town in Southwest Virginia, I have a 'thick' southern accent. The accent is noticeable as what is probably considered Highlands Southern. I'm just now realizing that not only geographical factors but also family and friends play a large role in linguistic development. Phrases such as "I reckon", "I'll have a pop", and "What's for supper?" are commonplace in my family and have been in my own speech. I learned early in my college career that such phrases are understood by many people yet even so they often warrant strange looks and even giggles. Through the course of time I began to change my speech patterns to fit in to what I considered to be the norm here at school By doing so I have basically taught myself (or convinced myself) that the way I speak here is more correct.

My work at Monticello however showed me that although my Southwest Virginia lingo differed from that in Charlottesville so does this lingo differ from that in Calif., Alaska, Louisiana, Australia and England. In a job where I had to be conscious of my speech forty hours a week under performance pressure I began to take more of an interest in the way the tourists at the house spoke when addressing. I noticed immediately that maybe I wasn't so blatantly wrong in my speech in the past and perhaps I can overcome my embarrassment of it. People everywhere have differences that go far beyond just differing accents. This is not to say that I will continue to say "I reckon" here at UVA (instead I may say "I suppose"), because there is an inherent value assigned to speech patterns, and I feel that people accept the validity of others' comments based upon how the comment has been made. I now realize though that I am not alone in this and that everyone has their own variation on language none of which is inherently better than the other.

It made a difference to one student to learn that she spoke 'Highland Southern.' That what she and her family spoke had a name. A name added identity, and a degree of legitimacy.

Several students remarked that they realized that at some point they had had to, or would have to, master 'standard English,' but that learning about diversity of language from the standpoint of linguistics/sociolinguistics made a difference. They

could separate the fact that it was socially necessary from prejudice against other forms of speech, including their own.

Taking linguistic assumptions for granted may happen even where it should be obvious that one should not. This was brought home to me recently in talking with an anthropological colleague who works in the Caribbean. He stressed the force of prejudice in education against Jamaican Creole, the living dominance of the view that only standard English counts, the way it affects what is done and who can do it. That should not have surprised me. But in the last thirty years the study of pidgin and creole languages has grown immensely. Thirty years ago, there were only a few scholars, a few significant studies. Now the literature grows so fast that even a specialist can hardly keep track. And the subject influences other branches of linguistics. Languages that were of interest to few are accepted as worthy of study by all. Interest in such languages flourishes so bountifully within the field that attitudes outside the field fade if one is not in direct contact with them.

In our own classes, there are very likely students who have the kinds of misconceptions we tend to forget. And for whom common practices of teaching and evaluation may be harmful. Indeed, we may have to face in our society an increasing authoritarianism like that in England. Here, as there, there may not only be practiced, but mandated, the costly policy of teaching a single standard that Harold Rosen protests in a recent essay, "The Nationalisation of English" (1991). Diversity of accent may be accepted in principle; so may the appropriateness of different styles to different situations. Yet the practice may be oppressive, Rosen argues, if there is no allowance for contestation and negotiation.

Insofar as the issue is the primacy of (standard) English, there is really no issue except a symbolic one, or perhaps a covert one. Students do recognize their social system, and that in it one language, and a version of that language, not their own, is firmly in place, with a social meaning for others that may not be their own (Edelsky, 1991, ch. 2). It still makes a difference if one recognizes the circumstances, does not 'misrecognize' them, understands that they might be otherwise (cf. Bourdieu, 1991).

In this context, one should note the widespread assumption that the brain has room for command of only one language. If that were true for Americans, they would have to be classed as biologically deficient, since multilingualism is a **normal** accomplishment in most of the world. Difference of language is not in itself divisive, although of course it can become the symbol of conflict in certain economic and political circumstances. A good way to make a language a symbol of conflict is to repress it.

Actual inequality

As linguists, we often act as if the kind of equality just discussed is the whole of the story. Rankings of languages, and of features of languages, is secondary and arbitrary. Where differences exist, the important points are (a) relativity, and (b) potential equality (or equivalence). Those who call attention to actual lack of equivalence may be stigmatized. As to abilities, the preferred image is the representative anecdote of Chomskian theory, the generalized unfolding ability of the child.

Each of these involves an equation of the potential with the actual. The ideal picture is poignant against the realities of our world, where pregnant women may not have enough to eat, and where judgments of subordination can be enforced.[2]

We may shut out findings that suggest actual inequality. Our methodological relativism–all languages are equal in the sight of science–is translated into the ideology that all languages are equal in the sight of humankind, or should be. Of course they should be when the evaluation is based on unfamiliarity or prejudice. But people often know perfectly well that they can accomplish some things in one language or variety that they can not in another. Sometimes the reason is a secondary prejudice, a matter of acceptability. Even then, knowledge that the privileging of one pronunciation or style over another is arbitrary does not remove the privilege. And sometimes the reason is truly a matter of what can be done. Any language has the potential to become a language in which scientific medicine is practiced. Most languages do not now have the vocabulary, discourse patterns, and texts.

The projection of actual equality echoes an older time, and the rise of linguistics in the nineteenth century. The origin and history of peoples was a nineteenth century preoccupation. Linguistics rose to intellectual prominence through its success in tracing common origins backward, subsequent diversification forward. The implicit picture was of the peopling of the world by groups marked by a single, autonomous language.

This implicit picture has continued well into this century. It was the unstated premise of discussions of linguistic relativity. The Hopi language might shape the Hopi view of the world because, it was implied, it was the only language the Hopi learned and used. The language was autonomous. Whatever came to expression in it, or did not, had its origin and explanation among the Hopi.

We all know that the world we live in is one in which communities with a single, autonomous language are scarce. Since the emergence of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls 'the world-system,' the great process affecting languages has not been separation and diversification, but contact and reintegration. Of course there has always been multilingualism, and, within a monolingual group, a plurality of styles or registers. Ways of using language have always been defined in relation to each other, have always been potentially in competition with each other. This has become the general case. Not only varieties, but most languages themselves probably now are alternatives within a repertoire. Most are not autonomous. What they can express is partly a function of their niche within the ecology of a community and larger society, influenced by policies and funding for schools, resources for printing, and the like.

When I entered linguistics, the rightness of the equality of all languages was so certain that it was believed, and argued, that one can express anything in any language, translate anything into any language, that all languages are equally complex. Not that one had evidence. The statements were simply consistent with, elaborations of, an insurgent and triumphant world view.[3]

These statements were felt consistent with a belief in the cognitive relativity of languages. In effect, equality of function but with different structures, different styles. We took delight in differences, in surprises, in the wonderful way another language might do something.

Some of you may have entered linguistics when another world view became triumphant and, for a while, believed and argued that there were essentially no cognitive differences, that differences of structure were superficial and without significant effect. Linguistic relativity, which had seemed obviously true, came to seem obviously wrong. Whorf, whose name had became attached to the notion, had seemed important and interesting, if not necessarily right; now he seemed naive (and to some still does).

One of the rewards of living a long time in the same line of work is that people bring back the tunes, the golden oldies, of one's youth. Now the study of metaphor and cognitive bases for grammar lend a certain respect to Whorf (Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1987, 1990, 1991). Emphasis on difference once made Whorf seem bad, to Joshua Fishman and others, insofar as difference might imply incapacity. Now emphasis on difference can be seen to reinforce respect for minority languages and Whorf has a role to play (Fishman, 1982). Peter Mühlhäulser and Rom Harré (1990) find it perfectly obvious that Whorf's claims are true for the individual, who internalizes particular kinds of social meaning in learning the person-marking of a language.[4]

Perhaps one can live long enough to see accepted within the core of linguistics the consequences of a world of only partly-autonomous languages, and varieties of language. A world in which the development of a given language or variety for a certain purpose may have a cost which will not be met. In which it is recognized that the same language name does not entail the same means and abilities. In which it is recognized that the dimensions which govern the development of pidginization and creolization govern the development of all languages.

The historically derived character of <u>any</u> language has to do with:

(a) scale of linguistic means, having regard both to outer form (simplification, complication) and inner form (reduction, expansion) in its various levels and domains;

(b) provenience of linguistic means, that is, confluence of traditions;

(c) scope of social role (restricted, extended), having to do with use within a group as primary or secondary means of communication, and between groups as well.

(d) contexts, with regard to selection and channeling of its use; motivation and identification on the part of persons involved; the communicative repertoires of the persons involved; relations to other linguistic norms. (Hymes, 1971:83).[5]

Contact and integration within a repertoire entails change in one or more of these dimensions. Since the emergence of a 'world-system,' hardly any language has escaped such change. Some have expanded, some contracted, in use and consequently in means as well. A wide range of processes–standardization, pidginization, creolization, obsolescence–are aspects of a general history. It will take some time to develop adequate pictures for all this, an understanding comparable to that achieved for 'genetic' diversification. But at least it is clear that the potential equivalence of all languages, and users of language, is not adequate as a picture.

The social meaning of language, in other words, of a language, is a function not only of immediate context, but also of <u>persistent</u> context. Over time, some possibilities of meaning, expressive as well as referential, poetic as well as pragmatic, have been cultivated, and others not. The means are at hand for indicating and shaping some kinds of meaning, and not for others. Some kinds of expression have a cost that others do not. Means of speech are sometimes evaluated in terms of characteristics that are not secondary, but <u>intrinsic</u>.

This is so even under conditions of primacy and autonomy. Languages, varieties, verbal repertoires adapt and evolve, developing some means and meanings and not others. Navajo over time became a language for dealing with the American Southwest, not so apt for snow, more adequate for maize, and the kind of cosmology expressed in Pueblo tradition. Every translator knows that there are things which can

be done in one language that can not be done in another. It is only if one divorces meaning from form that one can claim that there is completeness of translation. Given pages enough and time, that meaning, that effect that takes one line in the original can be explained. But still the meaning is not the same. Meaning is partly a matter of means. Elaboration, explanation substitute or insert the meaning of a different genre. What was funny or trenchant or compelling in the sound profile of a single line is not as a disquisition. The hearer or reader is changed into a student of a text, no longer an active participant in immediate recognition.

Intrinsic difference is all the more the case when a language or variety is constrained. (I have mentioned East Sutherland Gaelic, closely studied by Nancy Dorian; cf. my discussion of what Bloomfield reports about the Menomini, White Thunder (Hymes, 1974, ch. 3, pp. 71ff.).[6]

And as everyone knows in daily life, and especially those in the work of education, it is a fallacy to equate the resources of a language to the resources of (all) users. Knowing English may still leave someone inferior as a narrator to someone in a Native American or African American language tradition. Every community is diverse in relative command of the possibilities of the language(s) available. When one considers literacy, we are likely to live in a world in which almost everyone is 'literate' in some sense, yet command of literacy is cruelly stratified–often because the conditions under which children are introduced to literacy perpetuate inequality (Hymes, 1987), sometimes because the kind of literacy expected may alienate them from their communities (Edelsky, 1991, ch. 8, 'Risks and possibilities of whole language literacy: alienation and connection').

One must be willing to recognize that lack of equivalence is endemic to the world. Stigmatizing those who call attention to it (Whorf, Bernstein) is not a help. The help that is needed is to describe and compare such cases, to develop the ability to recognize and analyze recurrent types of case, and to address what can be done. An important part of that help can come from those who necessarily address the actual inequalities of minority languages and language learners. If human beings are not only language-using animals, but also goaded by the spirit of hierarchy, as two elements of Kenneth Burke's definition have it, then there will never be a lack of need for such work.

Oral Narrative

These two aspects of our language situation, of the world today, potential and actual, come together in narrative. Every community has narrative. Evidently it rests on an ability that is inherent in human nature, that is possible everywhere, perhaps as an aspect of the ability for language itself.

Like so much of language, much of the organization of oral narrative is out of awareness. We may take it for granted, but that is out of relative ignorance, not knowledge.

Nessa's dissertation was a pioneering contribution in this respect. She traced the use of the conversational historical present. Everyone is aware that in English a change into the historical present may dramatize what is said, convey immediacy. Instead of 'And then I saw...,' 'And then I see....' What no one realized until her study was that some occurrences of the historical present in conversation can not be explained that way. That whatever else may be the case, switching into and out of the historical present in conversation marks the beginning and end of a part of what is being said. The change itself is significant, segmenting the story. It is a device for giving narrative organization, unconsciously so.

Some years ago, Virginia and I independently began to analyze one of the narratives Nessa had recorded in the light of kinds of patterning we had found in Native American languages. She encouraged us in this. I would like to share with you now such an analysis of one of her favorite examples. We refer to it by its first line, 'She's a widow' (Appendix).

I should point out that this analysis is the last of several. Although some narratives follow an obvious pattern rather mechanically, many do not. They use principles shared with other stories, but somewhat individually; they have rhythms partly their own, an architecture that varies and emerges. One has to live with such a story for a while, become sensitive to its details and themes, try alternative ways of being true to both. The first analysis may be only one of a series of approximations. That has been the case with this story. The present analysis does seem to recognize every detail; to be consistent; to show a coherent development of themes.

To recognize the patterning of oral narratives, one must start with their lines and the ways in which lines constitute verses. One must go on to recognize relations among verses that constitute larger rhetorical forms. This is the step that few so far have taken.

The story is presented here in two forms. The first is the form in which it was published as part of the evidence for the conversational historical present–a continuous sequence of prose (Wolfson, 1982:25-7; 1989:140). The second presents the story as a sequence of lines.[7]

The shape of the sequence is indicated by certain conventions. One or more lines may go together in what can be called a verse. The first (or only) line of a verse is flush left. Verses may go together in what can be called a stanza. Between stanzas there is a space. Stanzas may go together in what can be called a scene. A scene is identified by lower case Roman numbers at the margin.

There appear to be two common types of organization in oral narratives. For many traditions, the unmarked, or default relation among elements is that of sets of two and four. For other traditions, the unmarked relation is that of sets of three and five. English itself is not uniform. Traditional stories from the British Isles, so far as we have observed, use two and four. Storytellers in the United States typically use three and five.

At one point it seemed that this narrative might be organized in relations of two and four, with four scenes overall. Possible parallels in the opening of stanzas suggested as much. Further review brought awareness of an awkward separation of parts of a conversational exchange at two points: of failure to recognize as verses, two lines marked by initial capitalization and final period; and, failure to grasp that parallel remarks about "making everything up" were ending points of parallel sections. All this fell into place when the narrative was seen as having five scenes, whose internal relations were three and five as well.

In traditions whose unmarked pattern is three and five, a striking rhetorical relation, one that occurs in widely separated languages–in the Chinookan family of the Pacific Northwest–in songs in the Kalevala tradition of Finnish, and in northeast Philadelphia English, is a relation of interlocking. In a sequence of five elements the first three may go together as a sequence of action, and the last three go together as well. The third element is a pivot, simultaneously ending one sequence and beginning another. In the arithmetic of such narratives, 3 + 3 can equal 5.

The relation of interlocking holds throughout 'She's a widow' and does so at several levels. At the level of the story as a whole, its five scenes interlock. The first three state a situation, report an opportunity and strategy, and reach an outcome, acceptance of the bid. At the same time, the third scene initiates three steps of acceptance: of price, certificates, date of settlement.

The stanzas within all scenes but the first (1-5) are linked by interlocking as well. Thus, the second scene (6-59) has five stanzas. The first two are marked initially in terms of summertime (AB), and the last two are marked finally in terms of 'making up a lot of things/everything' (DE). The first pair bring in the realtor and the narrator; the last pair bring in the narrator's wife in conversation with the realtor. These two pairs of stanzas are linked by a pivot (C). In this central stanza, the narrator finds out the true amount that had been bid for the house. That discovery is the outcome for the stanzas in which he becomes involved in an effort to buy the house (ABC). The discovery evidently also alerts him to a possible plan, and is the onset of the stanzas in which he initiates it. In sum, stanza (C) is at one and the same time the outcome of one series of three stanzas (ABC), and the onset of another (CDE).

The third and fourth scenes (lines 60-84, 85-103) each consist of pairs of conversational exchange. In each there are four pairs of conversational exchange, followed by a later call and an acceptance. In each the third pair is pivotal in that the narrator's wife (in iii), or the narrator (in iv) states a condition as outcome of what has so far occurred, and as onset of conclusion. The following (fourth) pair has the realtor say that the widow will not go for it. The final (fifth) pair has the later call and acceptance. Again, we have AB(C)DE.

The fifth scene (lines 104-42) turns on dates. The first stanza has the narrator say he will try to get January, rather than October. The second stanza has him change the agreement that way and insist. The third stanza has the widow refuse January. That in itself is a unified sequence of three stanzas. This conclusion of one three-part sequence proves to be the onset again of another three-part sequence. The next stanza is a response and a next step to the refusal of January. It begins with with a three-part sequence itself, ringing changes on months and dates:

"So then my next date was December,
and she went to November,
and I finally pushed her to November 18th"

and the third line, concluding that sequence of dates, initiates a further sequence and outcome within the verse:

"and I finally pushed her to November 18th
and that's where we got it,
and, uh, she did back off."

The first outcome is arrival at a third date, the second and final outcome is her refusal yet again.

A word further on the organization of this final scene. It is not surprising to find a scene organized as pairs of verses throughout, as is the case with scenes [iii] and [iv]. It does seem surprising to find just the last three stanzas of a scene as pairs, when the first two stanzas are not, the first scene having three verses, the second five, and clearly so. Just the first three verses have interchange between the narrator and his cousin. Just the next five verses have interchange between the narrator and the realtor.

But the same principle of change of stanza with change of participants applies to pairs of verses in what follows. Just the next two verses involve the realtor and the widow. And their outcome–

'So he took it back to her
and she called the deal off.
She wouldn't accept January'

is a third step, and outcome, in sequence with the preceding stanzas.

In the next two verses the participants change yet again. Now it is just the narrator and the widow who are involved. The two verses have indeed a strong marker of beginning, for this narrator, not just 'So' but 'So then' (cf. line 104, where 'So then' begins the scene as a whole). And the verses are internally linked by repetition of the words, and topic, 'back off.'

At the level of steps of action, also, if 'She wouldn't accept January' (third stanza) is the first step in a sequence of responses to the narrator's proposed settlement date, for her to back off is the second.

The third step comes in the next pair of verses. Its conclusiveness is signalled by 'finally' with regard to the widow, and the flat statement of final date:

She finally went –
we settled at November 18th.

Pairing is an obvious pattern when what is narrated is conversational exchange. The pairing here may be something of a change of pace, for intensification of effect. Certainly each of the pairs is a step in the action of the whole. The first three

stanzas have an outcome in the first pair, the first refusal. The narrator undertakes to try to get January, insists on January to the realtor, January is refused. At the same time the pair of verses containing the refusal is the start of another three-step sequence, refusal, backing off, acceptance. Each of these steps is evidently a point of structure at the level of the stanza.

The last two lines return the story to the present. No more widow, realtor, cousin or wife, or house to be bought. The lines seem to address the hearer, almost explicitly, changing what is said from a story to direct conversation, but at the same providing a final twist to all that has been recounted. Perhaps it is not an accident that the lines rhyme ('now' 'now'), analogous to a closing Shakespearean couplet, or to the formal words which return a Native American myth to the present.

On alternation of tenses

The analysis, and especially the analysis of the last scene and its last three stanzas, gains further point and support by attention to the use of tenses.

Use of the conversational historical present in relation to past and general present was indeed the focus of Wolfson's treatment of the narrative. Other writers have returned to the longstanding notion of the historical present as in itself expressive. Johnstone (1990:82-83) notes Schiffrin's claim (1981) that the historical present is an evaluative device, and advances the hypothesis that in her own data from Fort Wayne there is an evaluative role restricted to "the say/go system" (that is, to the use of certain verbs in attributing dialogue). She cites a story in which, whenever there is a tense difference in attributing discourse, it is the authority figure (police officer) whose words have the marked form, non-past for a past event; the nonauthority figure always has the unmarked past tense.

This story from Philadelphia is one source of Wolfson's finding that neither tense is marked in itself, that what is marked is the switch, that indeed the past may be the marked tense. A verse analysis of the story underscores this observation.

The short introductory scene begins with the general present (twice) and then has the past (twice). The second scene is entirely in the past for its first stanza (A), the past, general present and past for the second stanza (B), the past, general present and past for the third stanza (C). The fourth stanza (D) begins in the past (twice) and then introduces a convention of the narrator, namely, that communicative acts are in the present tense ('calls,' 'figure' (followed by quoted thought), 'gets on the phone,' 'says'). It is the third and fifth verses of this stanza, an intermediate and closing culmination,

that have past tense ('told, 'made up'). The fifth stanza (E) has two verbs of saying, then like the fourth closes in the past ('made up').

The central scene, the third, has five pairs of verses. The first four pairs are verbal exchanges between the realtor and the narrator's wife. All use 'says.' The fifth pair is the outcome, the first of three outcomes for the theme of the story, acceptance, and its two verbs are in the past ('got' 'was accepted').

The fourth scene follows the model of the third. There are four pairs of verbal exchange, all in the present, and a fifth pair for the outcome, acceptance. Here the fifth pair is also in the present ('get a call'), and quoted speech ('okay, she's accepted'). The present tense of 'get a call' can not be explained as communicative, because of the contrast with 'got a call' at the end of the preceding scene. It seems that the present tense becomes so much the unmarked tense that it carries through the whole scene and into the next, for the fifth scene begins by repeating 'get,' followed by non-communicative verbs now also in the present: 'do,' 'picks up,' 'take,' 'goes,' 'walk in,' 'sign,' as well as 'says.'

The present continues through the end of the second stanza (B) save for one verb not in the present, which, Wolfson observes (1982:36) expresses the real estate agent's astonishment when he discovers that the date was changed ("all of a sudden he looked at the agreement").

The remainder of the story is in the past tense. This highlights the narrator's last assertive demand ("Deal's off" [line 128]). This ultimatum is parallel to the final demand in each of the preceding two scenes. There the demand comes at the end of the fourth stanza. Here it comes at the end of the second.

What follows in all three scenes (iii, iv, v) has to do with acceptance. In [iii] and [iv] acceptance is quickly told in a single pair of verses, short and sweet as it were. Scene [v] might have ended that way as well. (When relations of three and five prevail, the third stanza is often a concluding stanza.) Here the third stanza (C) is a surprise (given the immediate acceptance in the preceding scenes), a complication, a bit of last minute suspense. The drama is expressed, not by tense change, but by position and elaboration.

There are three steps: stanza (C) reports refusal to accept, stanza (D) a backing off, stanza (E) acceptance at last.

The sequence of past tenses in these lines can be seen as equivalent structurally to the concluding past tense of scene [iii]. In this context it is the present tense of stanza (E) at the end of scene [iv] that stands apart. As suggested above, the present tense here seems not a *sforzando* but part of a continuity of line.

All this indicates that the expressive or evaluative role of tense change should be interpreted in relation to specific narrators, even specific narrations, and that interpretation of tense change may depend upon a structure of lines, verses, stanzas and scenes.

Overview

We see here a thoroughgoing shaping of personal experience. A mode of shaping which in the Sun's myth by the last Kathlamet Indian of the Columbia River able to recount myths undergirds and articulates a wrenching vision of the end of a people. A mode of shaping, which, perceived, gives point and proportion to what may have seemed to lack it, revealing meaning through implicit relations. Like much of syntax.

Perhaps better than anything else, oral narrative is an indication of the relation between potential and actual in language, the dialectic between potential equality and actual inequality. Every normal child may be born with the potentiality for such shaping, but not every community gives such shaping the same place. Oral narrative is central to a traditional Native American community, marginal perhaps to ours. Evidence there of the nature and shaping of the world, here something that can be dismissed as 'anecdote.' Even when languages survive, there may be no one who any longer has the old skills, or is encouraged to develop them anew. In this aspect of language, many communities may have been richer before Columbus than they, and many of us, are now.

Too little is known of the life of oral narrative to say very much. All one can say is that it appears likely that language carries with it everywhere the possibility of giving experience the form of story, richly shaped, by means of equivalences and internal relations that make it a kind of poetry. The one universal definition of poetry is organization in terms of lines. That is what we see in this narrative recorded by Nessa. When it comes to the possibility of poetry, Homer walked with the Macedonian swineherd, Li Po with the headhunting savage of Assam.[8] Recognition of this dimension of narrative may make it possible to find more meaning in, give more weight to what is sometimes dismissed as gossip or anecdote, yet is the only articulate form some experiences and lives achieve. It is already clear that recognition of this dimension can show narratives from Native American communities, perhaps dismissed by some as repetitively dull, to be significant works of art. The working out of this dimension of traditional narratives, recorded in the past by non-Indians, can be part of repatriation (Hymes, 1991).

In sum, there lies before us a vast work, that of discovering forms of implicit patterning, largely out of awareness, relations, a universal potential, whose actual realization varies. Recognition of its presence and possibility can enhance respect for, appreciation of voices of others. Not guarantee that what is said is true or admirable, but a **continuation of the tradition** of discovering in the oral what has not been recognized, of discovering in the oral relationships and values that have been thought to be restricted to the written. Not only do unwritten languages have grammar and regularity of change; their narratives have shape–often a thoroughgoing architecture.

Elementary linguistics

At the outset I suggested that a program in educational linguistics must necessarily attend to the dialectic of potential and actual in language.

I would like to make a final observation in that regard. There are many established varieties of linguistics . I would like to suggest one more term, relevant to all the topics touched upon. One often thinks of branches of linguistics in terms of the study of groups of languages: Germanic, Romance, Chinese, Finno-Ugric, Athapaskan, Niger-Congo (including Bantu), etc. Sometimes one thinks of the study of types of language, such as tone languages, ergative languages, pidgins and creoles, or the study of aspects of language, such as phonology, semantics, historical linguistics. If there is any simple contrast, probably it is that between 'theoretical linguistics' and 'applied linguistics.'

These two labels can be misleading. Those who work with practical situations do not merely apply the findings of 'theoretical linguistics,' for the simple reason that 'theoretical linguistics' does not take into account much of what needs to be known. It abstracts from social life altogether, or, if it models social life, abstracts from its actual patterns, often in an a priori way. Practical situations require a knowledge of language in use, and in terms of the situation itself. They require description of features of language and features of social life together. Application is not a matter merely of implementation, but a matter of acquiring new knowledge. Practical problems are a point of integration, of emergent configurations, if you will, a point at which the cases on which an adequate theory of language in use will depend.

Beyond this contrast between 'theoretical' and 'applied,' there is what one might call 'elementary linguistics.' It is the linguistics someone needs, not to write a grammar, but to read one. To recognize that two transcriptions of a word in a language of concern are not significantly different. To discern that something has

recurred in a conversation or a narrative. It is the linguistics that every student of human life should know, that one would like everyone to know, the linguistics that should be part of general education, indeed, of elementary education.

Such a linguistics would be equivalent to elementary 'literacy' in linguistics. It would give a grasp of the sounds and forms of language in general. It would enable those not linguists to make use of material of concern to them.[9] It would enable them to recognize in narratives points of recurrence and relations of shape. It would enable students at leading universities to understand that when someone says 'fightin,' they have not dropped a 'g,' but substituted one sound for another, an alveolar nasal for a palatal velar. It would mean not having to start over again from scratch in every course about language at a leading university. It would mean not having to explain the term 'aspect' to speakers of a language (English) in which it is pervasive. It is a linguistics that would enable people who can recognize and name so much of what is around them to recognize and name the elements of that which makes naming possible, language itself. And to approach the many social aspects of language, literacy, bilingualism, ethnic identity, and the like, in realistic terms.

Such an elementary linguistics would involve values that have been earned by experience: understanding the potential equality of all languages; understanding the secondary origin of most social meaning and evaluation of varieties of language; understanding as well that disparate historical circumstances shape languages differently, affecting what can actually be done with their resources now.

Elementary linguistics is ultimately a contribution to the well-being of linguistics itself, no doubt, but it is first of all a contribution to society. And it is where linguistics is undertaken to contribute to society that one can most hope for that contribution to be made.

Linguistics is so fascinating that it is easy to forget its connections with the world around it. It is where linguistic work is connected with practical problems and the circumstances of actual communities that one is most likely to realize the need to stress the potential equality/equivalence of all languages, grounded in human nature– to recognize the actual inequalities that obtain, to be brought face to face with the difference it can make to share with others understandings linguists may take for granted.

A field such as educational linguistics is in such a position. Its day to day experience can be linked to a general good, a humanistic goal, the understanding of the actual life of language and the sharing of that understanding with others.[10]

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[1] This makes it close kin of sociolinguistics, of course, and it is no accident that it is in educational linguistics, and applied linguistics more generally, that questions of communicative competence are most actively discussed.

[2] These points about the Chomskian representative anecdote, and its poignancy, first came to me in preparing a paper in 1967 for a conference on language and education.

[3] Such statements continue to be made. A manuscript I recently read (December, 1991) makes several, including the assertion that five-year-old children arrive at school knowing 95% of the rules of their language. The purpose is to defend the variety children may speak against prejudice. But 95% of what? Is there an accepted count of the number of rules of English? of any language?

Again, a book has just come out in a second edition (Aitchison, 1990) that argues that in language change disruption and therapy seem to balance each other in a perpetual stalemate, and that a language never allows disruptive change to destroy the system. It does so to argue against prejudiced views of language change. But the statements seem disingenuous if Eastern Sutherland Gaelic and other obsolescent varieties are considered languages. It seems not to allow for the elaboration that leads to a creole.

These arguments seem couched in terms of a tacit equivalence of all varieties, between potential and actual equality. To seek equality by assuming that it already exists everywhere, needing only to be recognized. My point is that social inequality, social change, social challenge, have linguistic effects, and that calling the world equal will not make it so. Actual equality is something to be achieved. We can not expect to achieve it, and to overcome belief in its absence, by asserting as true what no one knows, or by denying experiences many have had.

[4] For extended and thoughtful discussion of the current state of the subject, see Lucy (1991) and three books expected this year (1992a, 1992b, 1992c).

[5] What precedes generalizes to all languages the characteristics of pidginization and creolization, as indicated by a survey of information two decades ago (Hymes, 1971: 83). It was a point of that essay that pidgins and creoles were complex configurations of processes more widely shared.

[6] The example is taken up more fully in the original article of 1967, and in somewhat different form as the beginning of ch. 2 of Toward linguistic competence (1973, 1984).

[7] Neither Virginia nor I have heard the tape of the narrative. We have worked from the text as presented in Nessa's dissertation, and as published in her monograph of 1982 (pp. 25-7), and in a later article (1989: 140). In doing so, Virginia particularly has paid scrupulous attention to the details of the transcription. Commas, periods, and capitalization have been consistently used as indications of verses in the light of her experience with a variety of English oral narratives.

[8] To adapt Sapir's well known sentence about linguistic form (1921: 219).

[9] This past summer (1991) I received a letter from Coos Bay, Oregon, from the man in charge of cultural heritage for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians. He knew that almost 40 years ago I had sought out the last speakers of those languages, and learned something at least of Siuslaw. We drove down. He himself (Donald Whereat) was a Coos descendant, and knew nothing of the language, but he had systematically gathered together everything that had been done and was known about the language, including correspondence among those who had studied it. He was without illusions or ideology. He simply needed help in understanding what he had gathered–to begin with, the differences in the symbols used by two linguists at different times to write the language. Virginia undertook to provide him first with an understanding of the sounds of his own English, and then, through that, with an understanding of the respects in which the sounds of Coos were different. He could have

learned the symbols, the logic of their presentation in a chart, and the descriptive terms, at any time in his life. It was almost an accident that he reached someone to share the information with him. There must be many such instances of alienation from knowledge of one's own heritage for lack of elementary linguistics.

[10] A version of this paper will appear in the proceedings of the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (GURT) for 1992. I am grateful to Dean James Alatis for the opportunity to share something from Nessa's research with that audience.

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Appendix

"She's a widow"

She's a widow. [i] ["She's a widow"]
She's a widow,
she put the house up originally during the winter for forty-five--
with Langsdorf.
She couldn't move it.

Came summertime, [ii] [opportunity, strategy]
she handed it over to Larry Snyder at --
thirty-seven five.
So they had a couple people in--
the bids were--
she had a bid for thirty-five
and got stubborn
and didn't take it.

So as the summer went,
she got sick,
and she's in the hospital now,
and she's living in an apartment
and uh --they--
when I went to see it,
the guy says to me,
says, "We got a bid for thirty-three-- thirty-four,"
says, "If you bid thirty-five," he says,
"You'll get it."
I said, "Okay, let me think it over."

And I went home
and I called my wife's cousin who's a realtor.
Well, his partner knows Snyder well,
so he called him up.
The bid was for twenty-seven, five!

So I figured
they could do the same thing I was going to do.
So he calls me up the next day
and I figure,
"Look, I could always bid a little higher than the guy
and work my way up."
So he calls me the next day,
and I told my wife exactly what to say. [stanza continued]

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So he gets on the phone
and so my wife says,
"Look, we're not talking land,
we're talking house.
"The house isn't worth it
and it needs a lot of work."
You know,
and we made up a lot of things ....
"We have to paper and paint it."

So he says,
"That you have to do in any house."
So she says,
"Yes, we have to lay down new floors;
the rugs are no good"
(the rugs happen to be in good shape).
"We have to--
there's too much shrubbery,
we have to tear out some of the shrubs."
(The shrubbery around the house is magnificent
if it's done right,
if it's done right).
So we really made up everything.

[iii] [bid accepted]

So he says to my wife, he says,
"Well, what would you bid?"
So she says,
"It's stupid for me to talk," she says,
"You got a bid for thirty-three, thirty-four," she says,
"Why should I even talk to you?
"It ain't gonna be anywheres near."

So he says to her, he says,
"Well," he says,
"the person at thirty-four backed out."
So she says, "Oh yeah?"

He says,
"Yeah," he says,
"What would you bid?"
So she says, "Twenty-eight."

[stanza continued]

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He says, "Oh," he says,
"No, that she'll never go for."
So she says,
"Okay, that's my bid, Mr. Smith.
"You want it,
fine.
"You don't,
fine."

Got a call that afternoon.
It was accepted!

[iv] [certificates accepted]

So I go to see the house--
I go to sign the contract,
I look at the contract
and I says, "I ain't signing this."

He says, "Why?"
I says, "I want a plumbing certificate.
"I want an air conditioning certificate,
"I want a heating certificate,
"and I want a roof certificate."

So he says, "Really, we won't guarantee..."
I says, "I don't want guarantee,
"I want certificates,
from certified people that it's in good shape,
"and I want the right to bring in any of my guys."

So he says, "She won't go for it ... this, that..."
So I says, "Aah, don't be silly," I says,
"Look, you just take it to her."

So I get a call back about a day later,
"Okay, she's accepted."

[v] [settlement date accepted]

So then I get a --
now what I do is,
I pick up this thing,
I take it to my cousin,
he goes to someone,

he says, "Settlement's no good.
"She's got us for forty-five days."
In October she wanted to settle.
So I says, "Okay, I'll try to get a January
"and I'll play around with that."

So I walk in
and I sign a check for twenty-eight hundred dollars,
and I says to him, I says,
"Now," I says,
"Take this back to her."
So he picked up the agreement--
all of a sudden he looks at the agreement.
He says, "Well," he says,
"This uh date was changed."
I says, "That's right.
"Settlement."
I says, "Now you take it
and show her the check.
She wants to play around fine.
Deal's off!"

So he took it back to her
and she called the deal off.
She wouldn't accept January.

So then my next date was December
and she went to November,
and I finally pushed her to November 18th
and that's where we got it,
and, uh, she did back off.
I didn't expect her to back off, though,
with a check of twenty-eight thousand dollars.

Cause she knew it was settled, you know,
the deal was there.
She finally went--
we settled at November 18th.

And I got to sell my house now-- [epilogue]
three weeks now."

'She's a widow' profile

[i]	A	a	1	'She's a widow'
		b	2-4	'She's a widow' ... (triad)
		c	5	'She couldn't move it' (ending point)
				[Opportunity, strategy]
[ii]	A	a	6-8	Came summertime
		b	9-10	So they... --...--
		c	11-13	she.....'didn't take it' (triad)
	B	a	14-18	So as the summer went...and uh -- they--(quintad)
		b	19-23	when I went to see it,... "you'll get it" (quintad)
		c	24	I said, "---"
	C	a	25-6	And I went home/ and
		b	27-8	Well..., so he called him up.
		c	29	twenty-seven, five!
	D	a	30-1	So I figured....
		b	32-5	So he calls me... /and I figure, "---"
		c	36-7	So he calls me/and I
		d	38-43	So he../and so "---"
		e	44-6	You know/made up a lot of things/ "---"
	E	a	47-8	So he says...
		b	49-58	So she says...
		c	59	So we really made up everything
				[iii] [Bid accepted] [realtor and wife]
[iii]	A	a	60-1	So he says to my wife..
		b	62-6	So she says, you've got 33-34
		c	67-9	So he says to her....at 'thirty-four' backed out.
		d	70	So she says...
		e	71-3	He says,
		f	74	So she says, 'twenty-eight'
		g	75-6	He says
		h	77-82	So she says
		i	83	Got a call that afternoon
		j	84	It was accepted!

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[iv] [certificates accepted] [realtor and husband]

[iv]	A	a	85	So I go...
		b	86-88	I go, look, says "..." (triad)
	B	a	89	He says
		b	90-3	I says
	C	a	94	So he says
		b	95-8	I says
	D	a	99	So he says
		b	100-1	So I says
	E	a	102	So I get a call
		b	103	"accepted"

[v] [settlement date accepted]

[v]	A	a	104-10	So then I--, now what I do is,..., he says "--".
		b	111	In October settle
		c	112-3	So I says...'January'...
	B	a	114-8	So I walk in...."---"
		b	119-20	So he...
		c	121-2	He says, 'date changed'
		d	123-4	I says,
		e	125-8	I says,
	C	ab	129-30, 131	So then.. /She wouldn't accept January
	D	ab	132-6, 137-8	So... (quintad)/I.../...
	E	ab	139-40, 141-2	Cause... ; She finally went...
[epilogue]			143-4	And I got sell my house now.../ now.

In sum:	*[i]*	*abc*	*she*
	[ii]	*AB(C)DE*	*narrator + realtor,/ wife + realtor*
	[iii]	*ab cd (ef) gh ij*	*wife and realtor*
	[iv]	*ab cd (ef) gh ij*	*narrator and realtor*
	[v]	*AB(C)DE*	*narr. + realtor, realtor + she, narr. + she (3 times)*
	[epilogue]	*couplet*	*narr + audience*